The Pagan Library

Lay Of The High One

From the old Norse Verse, Lay of the High one, stanzas 138, 139, and 141

Anon

Woden/Odin is speaking
" I know that I hung there
on the windy tree
swung there nights, all of nine
gashed with a blade
bloodied by Odin
myself an offering to myself
knotted to that tree
no man knows whither the root of it runs

None gave me bread
None gave me drink
down to the depths I peered
to snatch up runes
with a roaring screech
and fall in a dizzying faint

> Wellspring I won
> and wisdom too
> and grew and joyed in my growth
> from a word to a word
> I was led to a word
> from a deed to another deed

As you can see this legend, which in the original sources pre-dates Christianity, has much in common with the legend of Jesus's Crucifixion/Resurrection in the Newer religion - but then there are similar themes in the story of Tammuz from the Middle East, the story of Osiris in Egypt and in many other sources. The story of the fallen God who is resurrected with great power and wisdom reflects the Shamans's confrontation with his own death - either in a literal sense through sickness or accident, or in a Psychological sense or by other means such as the mild, natural hallucinogens used by the Native Americans and other tribal peoples. (NOTE, I AM NOT ENDORSING THERE USE; THEY ARE COMPLETELY UNNECESSARY - but nevertheless, this is the practice in some cultures, where they know how to handle the power of these drugs and guide one safely through the experience. It is important to note this is not done lightly or playfully either and that the drugs they use are NATURAL substances, not the harsher chemical ones abused in our modern society for recreational use)

It also represents the natural cycles of the year - the grain grows and is cut down or sacrificed only to be reborn again, the trees lose their leaves and seem to die only to resurrected, (which is why the tree of life/cross image developed) some animals hibernate and come back, etc.

Now here is the legend of the Goddess in the Saxon form as the search by Freya for the necklace Brosingame - a silver circlet worn about her neck as a chaplet. As with the Gardnerian Wicca legend of the descent of the Goddess to the Underworld, it reflects the cycles of the year - when fertility seems to sink into the earth and vanish during winter's barren months only to have the Lady and her bounty return to us in the spring.

(Matrika's notes)

1. All day had Freya, most lovely of the Goddesses, played and romped in the fields. Then did she lay down to rest.
2. And while she slept; deft Loki, the prankster, the mischief-maker of the Gods; did espy the glimmering of Brosingame, formed of Galdra (magick) Her constant companion. Silent as the night did Loki move to the Goddess's side and with fingers formed over the very ages in lightness did remove the silver circlet from about her snow white neck.
3. Straightaway did Freya arouse; on sensing it's loss. Though he moved with the speed of the winds, yet Loki she glimpsed as he passed swiftly from sight into the barrow (burial mound) that leads to Dreun. (land of the dead, the underworld)
4. Then was Freya in despair. Darkness descended all about her to hide her tears. Great was her anguish. All light, all life, all creatures joined in her doom.
5. To all corners were sent the Searchers, in quest of Loki; yet knew they. they would find him not. For who is there may descend to Dreun and return again from thence?
6. Excepting the Gods themselves and, alzck, mischievous Loki.
7. So it was that, still weak from her grief, Freya herself elected to descend in search of Brosingame. At the portals of the Barrow was she challenged, yet recognized and passed.
8. The multitude of souls within cried joyfully to see her, yet could she not tarry as she sought her stolen light.
9. The infamous Loki left no trail to follow, yet was he everywhere past seen. Those to whom she spake held to Freya (that) Loki carried no Jewel as he went by.

10. Where then was it hid?
11. In despair she searched an age. Hearhden (also known as Heimdall) the mighty smith of the Gods, did arise from his rest to sense the bewailment of the souls to Freya's sorrow. Striding from his smithy, to find the cause of the sorrow, did he espy the Silver Circlet where Loki Mischief-maker had laid it; upon the rock before his door.
12. Then was all clear.
13. As Hearhden took hold of Brosingame (then did) Loki appear before him, his face wild with rage.
14. Yet would Loki not attack Hearhden, this mighty smith whose strength was known even beyond Dreun.
15. By wiles and tricks did he strive to get his hands upon the (silver) circlet. He shape-shifted; he darted here and there; he was visible, then invisible. yet could he not sway the Smith.
16. Tired of the fight, Hearhden raised his mighty club. Then sped Loki away.
17. Great was the joy of Freya when Hearhden placed Brosingame about her snow-white neck.
18. Great were the cries of Joy from Dreun and above.
19. Great were the thanks that Freya and all People gave to the Gods for the return of Brosingame.

This tale and the Gardnerian legend of the descent of the Goddess into the Underworld (told in the 2d degree initiation) and similar myths from around the world, such as the legend of Kwan Yin's descent to the land of death and her being expelled for spreading mirth and joy, show that women also shared a very important role in the shamanism/priesthood of the European Pagan traditions and also faced the ordeals - i.e. the physical or psychological confrontation with death. And again, it reflects the times of darkness and light in the year - the waxing and waning of the moon each month and the waxing and waning of the sun each year from Yule or Winter solstice to Mid-summer's night or Summer solstice when the light grows stronger and the remainder of the year, when light grows weaker.

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